

2021 Islamophobia Review

A Bridge Initiative article series chronicling the prevalence of Islamophobia around the globe in the year 2021



Overall, 2021 demonstrated that Islamophobia remains a constant and growing threat around the globe. Anti-Muslim racism in 2021 remained ever present as hate crimes and individual attacks targeting Muslims persisted. Across the globe, the key players of anti-Muslim racism were again states themselves, as this year witnessed increasing discriminatory legislation and policies. China continued to deny the growing body of evidence pointing to genocide being committed against Uyghur Muslims and an international tribunal was held in the U.K. with testimony from survivors of Xinjiang's concentration camps. In Canada, a man killed a Muslim family of four in a horrific calculated hit-and-run, leading to Canadian Muslims demanding the government take concrete measures to tackle Islamophobic violence. In France, President Emmanuel Macron's government took a page from China's book by implementing legislation aimed at constructing a state-approved Islam, resulting in widespread discrimination targeting Muslim civil society and curtailing the rights of French Muslims, especially women. Similarly, the Austrian government took measures to intimidate and silence Austrian Muslim activists and organizations, even going so far as to publish a map detailing the locations of hundreds of mosques and associations. In the United Kingdom, the ruling Conservative party persisted in evading calls to address institutional Islamophobia within its ranks. State hostility and prejudice towards Muslims was present across the European continent, with rulings aimed at restricting Muslim identity such as halal meat and hijab bans. In India, the country's growing Hindu nationalist forces retained last year's theme of conspiracy theories, claiming Indian Muslims were engaging in "love jihad," "economic jihad," and even "narcotics jihad." Additionally, there were large episodes of anti-Muslim violence in various parts of the country such as Tripura, Gurgaon, and Assam, all of which were supported by the rising Hindu nationalist voices. The year was also spent uncovering the role of social media platforms in larger campaigns of violence targeting Muslims as seen in India and Myanmar. In the United States, the country marked twenty years since the deadly September 11th attacks and reckoned with the impacts and consequences of two decades of the War on Terror at home and abroad.

2021 Islamophobia in review: United States

With the inauguration of Joe Biden as the country's 46th president, American Muslims welcomed the new administration and celebrated as Biden [reversed](#) Trump's [Muslim Ban](#). While applauding the measure, many noted that a reversal would not bring [back the time and lives lost](#) as a result of the previous discriminatory measure, and [called](#) on Biden to use this moment to tackle the presence of anti-Muslim racism in society, calling for accountability and justice.

As Biden took office, new Republican representatives took their positions following the 2020 elections, including Representatives [Marjorie Taylor Greene](#) and [Lauren Boebert](#), whose numerous stunts of harassment and bullying played out throughout the year. They repeatedly targeted Minnesota Representative Ilhan Omar with anti-Muslim slurs, such as calling her "[pro Al-Qaeda](#)," a member of the "[jihad squad](#)" (a slur that also plays on the "[the Squad](#)" label given to Rep. Omar and her fellow three progressive congresswomen), and a terrorist. Following Boebert's discriminatory and dangerous remarks, Omar received an uptick in hate mail and played one of the many [death threats](#) she had received in which a man [called](#) her a "Muslim sand n***** bitch," and threatened "there's plenty that will love the opportunity to take you off the face of this f*cking earth. You will not live much longer, b*tch, I can almost guarantee you that."

The episode highlighted the growing acceptance and even tacit approval of Islamophobia in the GOP, as leadership failed to take action against Boebert and did not publicly condemn her comments. Boebert herself refused to publicly apologize to Omar, and even doubled down on the anti-Muslim harassment and bullying, [claiming](#) the Muslim congresswoman was "playing the victim." House minority leader Kevin McCarthy's silence in the face of these discriminatory remarks could be [explained](#) by the fact that data demonstrates that Republican voters largely hold anti-Muslim views. A 2018 study conducted by Dr Maneesh Arora [found](#) that 54 per cent of Republicans surveyed would vote for an anti-Muslim candidate, and separately noted that a 2020 YouGov survey found that 37 percent of Republicans approved of discrimination against Muslims. Further, the GOP fully supported former President Donald Trump, who arguably made Islamophobia a part of his campaign and presidency, and repeatedly targeted Rep. Ilhan Omar with anti-Muslim smears and rhetoric. Boebert it appears is simply following standard party practice by employing Islamophobia to amp up her base. This year also demonstrated that Republican representatives who've aligned with former President Trump (and embodied his tactics) are not some "fringe" figures, rather they've become "[indicators](#)" of where the party is headed and the values it upholds.

While the GOP leadership fails to hold Boebert accountable, House Democrats [passed](#) a new bill (led by Omar and [Rep. Jan Schakowsky](#)) that would establish a new special envoy position at the State Department to monitor and combat Islamophobia worldwide. It's unlikely this bill will get passed in the Senate but it is indicative of where the country stands: despite the entrenchment of Islamophobia in society, there is a growing movement against it.

2021 also marked 20 years since 9/11 and the inauguration of the war on terror that saw the U.S. invade Afghanistan and Iraq and wage drone strikes across the globe including in Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and Syria (to name a few). This year was one of reflection of the global impact of this borderless and timeless war. New data from Brown University's Costs of War project [found](#) that in the last three years alone, the U.S. has been active in counterterrorism operations in at least 85 countries. The domestic and global impacts of the War on Terror were painstakingly explored in American journalist Spencer Ackerman's book, "Reign of Terror," published in August of this year, which explored how the structure and framing of America's counterterrorism operations, which were [aimed](#) at fighting an "amorphous concept like terrorism," that allowed for two decades of mass state-sponsored violence.

The following excerpt from Ackerman's book sums up the past two decades:

In response to 9/11, America had invaded and occupied two countries, bombed four others for years, killed at least 801,000 people — a full total may never be known — terrified millions more, tortured hundreds, detained thousands, reserved unto itself the right to create a global surveillance dragnet, disposed of its veterans with cruel indifference, called an entire global religion criminal or treated it that way, made migration into a crime, and declared most of its actions to be legal and constitutional. It created at least 21 million refugees and spent as much as \$6 trillion on its operations. Through it all, America said other people, the ones staring down the barrel of the War on Terror, were the barbarians.

August also witnessed the U.S. pull all of its troops out of Afghanistan, resulting in what can only be described in a humanitarian catastrophe as the Taliban returned to power and millions of Afghans faced uncertainty with the new regime and economic hardship. It's hard to forget the devastating images and video of Afghans desperately trying to flee for safety, rushing to the airports and clinging to the wings of planes. During this time period, a U.S. [drone strike](#) killed ten members (seven of them children) of a family, drawing international outrage to an act that has been occurring for at least the last 15 years but too little attention. The drone strike brought the use of unmanned arrival vehicles into conversation and called attention to the number of civilian deaths these weapons were responsible for. A powerful investigation by Azmat Zahra for the *New York Times* [revealed](#) that the Pentagon's own records showed how "the air war has been marked by deeply flawed intelligence, rushed and often imprecise targeting, and the deaths of thousands of civilians, many of them children, a sharp contrast to the American government's image of war waged by all-seeing drones and precision bombs." In a rare turn of events, the U.S. government [admitted](#) that they had killed innocent civilians in the Kabul strike, calling it "a horrible tragedy of war," but upheld the last two decades war on terror mantra that [no crime has been committed](#); there was no "criminal negligence." No one was held responsible for the deaths of those 10 civilians and drone strikes continue to be supported by authorities despite even greater evidence supporting the [argument](#) that drone strikes don't work and have routinely killed civilians.

This year also marked the deaths of former Secretary of State [Colin Powell](#) and former Secretary of Defense [Donald Rumsfeld](#), both men who played a leading role in the construction and promotion of the war on terror. Powell sold the war in Iraq to the United Nations, [claiming](#) that Saddam Hussain had ‘Weapons of Mass Destruction’ (all of which proved to be false). The total number of Iraqi civilian deaths as a result of the war is unknown but the Iraq Body Count project [places the number](#) of deaths since 2003 between 185,724 and 208,831, as of June 30.

Rumsfeld was the individual who authorized the “enhanced interrogation,” aka [torture](#), of individuals U.S. authorities arrested and detained during the war on terror. A 2002 memo [signed](#) by Rumsfeld [authorized](#) “20-hour interrogations, use of phobias, and stress positions.” Rumsfeld’s orders resulted in the abuse of hundreds of prisoners in US custody, including those held at Guantanamo Bay. Since it was opened in 2002, the prison at the military naval base has held [780 Muslim boys and men](#); today it remains open with [39 prisoners](#), 14 of whom are being held indefinitely without charge. The prison continues to be a living contradiction to the values the U.S. claims on the global stage: a living remnant of the atrocities committed by the United States in the name of security.

The year also marked 20 years of a domestic war on terror and the ramifications of government [surveillance](#) and suspicion has had on the American Muslim community. From reflecting on the consequences of being on the government’s [no-fly list](#) to the Supreme Court [deciding](#) “whether a lawsuit can go forward in which a group of Muslim residents of California allege the [FBI targeted](#) them for surveillance because of their religion,” it was a year of reckoning.

20 years later and the long-lasting devastation as a result of state-sponsored Islamophobia is finally being acknowledged and spoken about. American Muslims reflected on government rhetoric and programs that for the past two decades marked them as threats and suspicious, and how that resulted in widespread [violations](#) of their [civil rights and liberties](#).

As mentioned earlier, while Islamophobia remains ever-present within American government and society, the U.S. also witnessed greater a political involvement from Muslims, inaugurating a new set of American Muslim politicians who won seats in local elections across the country. In New York, Shahana Hanif became the [first Muslim woman](#) elected to NYC council, while in Boston, MA, Tania Fernandes Anderson [gained](#) her council seat by defeating her opponent “who had relied heavily on anti-Muslim rhetoric in his campaign.” Other [successful campaigns](#) in Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey and Pennsylvania also put Muslims in key local offices, with the city of [Hamtramck](#) in Michigan electing the country’s first all-Muslim city council. Further, President Biden [nominated](#) and the Senate [confirmed](#) the appointment of Rashad Hussain as Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom (IRF).

2021 was a year of reflection and calls for accountability as the country marked twenty years since the 9/11 attacks and the onset of the global war on terror, which has had catastrophic reverberations abroad and at home. Despite the entrenchment of Islamophobia in certain segments of the government and amongst portions of the public, there is a vocal and growing movement pushing back against this dangerous bigotry.

2021 Islamophobia in review: India

Throughout 2021, Indian Muslims found themselves on the receiving end of countless mob attacks and state violence as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government continued to embolden the country's right-wing Hindu nationalist forces. Further, conspiracy theories constructing Indian Muslims as a threat to the Hindu majoritarian population gained credibility thanks to the rhetoric and actions of politicians and the government. The right-ward shift in the subcontinent also led many commentators and experts in the region to fear that Modi's rule was leading to a [decay](#) in the world's largest democracy as journalists critical of the government were targeted and imprisoned and counter-terror legislation was used to silence critics. In a testament to increasing state hostility, even elite actors and actresses of India's Bollywood were not immune to the Hindu nationalist government's assault on free speech.

The year began with headlines about Assam, a BJP-led state in northeastern India, which through the past few years has been the site of state-led persecution against the Muslim community. This year, the ruling government [banned](#) all public Islamic schools, with a minister [defending](#) the measure stating children should grow up to be "professionals, not "imams." The law was initially [passed](#) at the end of 2020, with authorities vowing to convert all government-run madrassas to education facilities [minus](#) the teaching of religious scripture. Alongside this, the state pursued its [eviction](#) drive, which impacted Muslim villagers. Officials enforced a spate of [forced evictions](#) impacting thousands of Muslim families across 25,000 acres of land, which they had been living on for more than 40 years. Assam's government aims to [clear](#) the villages to make room for a "modern farming" project to be given over to the state's Indigenous youths. Muslim villagers protested the eviction notices, asking for more time, only to be met with [armed police](#) in riot gear. During the ensuing [violence](#), villagers' houses were razed to the ground and some set on fire. A video from this episode of violence went [viral](#) showing photographer Bijoy Baniya jumping on the bullet-ridden body of Mainal Haq, one of the Muslims shot and killed by the police. Commenting on the growing violence targeting Muslims in Assam, Abjalur Mehdi, general secretary of the Sipajhar unit of the All Assam Minority Students Union [noted](#) that "every Bengali-speaking person is labelled a foreigner without any proof." Painting Indian Muslims as foreigners has been a [repetitive claim](#) of the BJP, who adhere to a Hindu nationalist viewpoint to make India a Hindu-only nation.

One aspect of this campaign to make India a Hindu-only nation has been to target interfaith couples. Hardline Hindu groups along with sectors of the Indian media, politicians, and commentators have popularized the "[love jihad](#)" conspiracy theory, claiming that Muslim men are engaged in a plot to lure and forcibly convert Hindu women in order to marry them and gain demographic domination. Proponents of this theory claim that efforts must be taken to stop "love jihad" in [order](#) to preserve the country's Hindu majority. There has been a real-world fallout from this theory as interfaith couples find themselves the [targets](#) of this growing and hostile discourse. Last year, at least [two states](#) including Uttar Pradesh (India's most populous state and home to around 40 million Muslims) passed legislation banning "unlawful religious conversions" through marriage, lending credibility to the right-wing conspiracy theory. To further demonstrate the collaboration between authorities and Hindu nationalist groups, a July 2021 *Intercept* [piece](#) found that Hindu vigilante groups were working alongside law enforcement

enforce the “love jihad” law in Uttar Pradesh. Further, the claims of villainous Muslim plots to overtake the country weren’t limited to “love jihad,” as government and religious figures put forward other buzzwords like “[economic jihad](#),” and “[narcotics jihad](#)” to paint Indian Muslims as an imminent overarching threat. Such accusations and manufactured hysteria have deeply impacted the safety and livelihoods of Indian Muslims.

It’s not only Indian Muslims who are facing increasing hostility as there has been a drastic increase in the [persecution](#) of the country's minority Christian population. In addition to Muslims, authorities have wielded the “forcible conversion” claims against the Christian community as well. In December, the Karnataka state assembly [passed](#) a new anti-conversion legislation, making it the 10th state in India to [enact](#) the so-called “Freedom of Religion” law, which “bars religious conversions, except when a person ‘reconverts to his immediate previous religion’ – a clause that critics say is aimed at enabling India’s many Hindu supremacist groups to convert Muslims and Christians into Hindus.” The ruling BJP has [claimed](#) the bill aims to stop “the illegal and large-scale conversion of Hindus to Christianity,” a claim that has yet to be proven. In addition to such legislation, Indian Christians have been [targeted](#) by Hindu vigilantes who’ve attacked [churches](#), convent schools, and [Christmas celebrations](#). From January to September 2021, the country [experienced](#) 305 attacks on the Christian community and their places of worship, with the real number being much higher given many cases go unreported. Commenting on the current situation, a political scientist [noted](#) that all of this is occurring because the ultimate aim is “to isolate and demonize minorities so that a Hindu state is established.”

Bearing some similarities to China’s campaign targeting Uyghurs, Indian authorities in the last few years have [increasingly](#) sought to criminalize, erase, or completely destroy aspects of Muslim identity in the country. In 2021, this was demonstrated by the [razing](#) of a 100-year-old mosque in Uttar Pradesh in May. Campaigns to polarize nearly all aspects of life in India have continued by right-wing Hindu forces as this year witnessed a [hate campaign](#) against the Urdu language, deemed a “Muslim” language by the Hindutva project and therefore not permissible in India. The project to declare anything [associated](#) with Muslims and Islam as a marker of disloyalty or simply “anti-Indian” spilled over to sports, as the police [arrested](#) a number of Indian youth in October for celebrating Pakistan’s win in a cricket match. While this episode built on historical animosity between India and Pakistan, the 21st century Hindu nationalist campaign has increasingly made religion the central focus of attack.

Additionally, other segments of Indian society have not been immune to the growing authoritarian hue of the BJP. Indian journalists, especially those critical of the state, have also been on the receiving end of the government’s [discriminatory](#) legislation. The government has wielded the country’s counter-terror laws to silence critics and activists, leading many to note that the legislation has become a “[political weapon](#).” Freedom of [speech](#) and [academic freedom](#) became an increasingly important [issue](#) in 2021, as Indian police opened investigations against lawyers and journalists over social media posts bringing attention to anti-Muslim violence in the country.

Even Bollywood, India’s beloved entertainment industry, could not protect itself from the reach of Modi’s government as this year witnessed growing fervor against Indian actors and actresses,

especially those who made any comments about the deepening divide and sectarian violence in the country. The arrest and month-long imprisonment of the son of Shah Rukh Khan, the king of Bollywood, was [viewed by](#) liberals as a “deliberate move intended to tarnish a Muslim idol’s image to appease the Hindu right.” The right-wing Hindu forces in the country did not take well to Khan’s previous comments speaking out against the lynchings of Muslims, in which he [stated](#) “religious intolerance and not being secular in this country is the worst kind of crime that you can do as a patriot.” Commentators and experts have contended that Modi’s government’s targeting of Indian Muslim Bollywood stars is part of a campaign to intimidate anyone who dares criticize the government, as not even the king of Bollywood could [escape the grasp](#) of Hindu nationalist forces in the country.

In addition to Assam, anti-Muslim violence flared up in a number of other regions in the country, such as Tripura and Gurgaon. In the state of Tripura, right-wing groups [launched](#) attacks against the Muslim population, viewed as [revenge](#) attacks for anti-Hindu violence occurring in [neighboring](#) Bangladesh. At least ten incidents of violence were reported in four days at the end of October this year, as mobs targeted mosques and properties owned by Muslims. Reporting on Tripura riots noted that the violence occurred [following](#) a rally [attended](#) by over 3,000 individuals and led by “the hardline Hindu organization, Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) - a close ally of the BJP.” In Gurgaon, a city just southwest of New Delhi, Hindu hardliners led [harassment campaigns](#) against Muslims by targeting public prayer spaces and publicly [declaring](#) Muslims would not be allowed to hold Friday prayers. The campaigns of harassment and intimidation continued for weeks as Hindu groups [disrupted](#) Muslim prayers by smearing cow dung in the public space or holding their own Hindu religious events, with one being [attended](#) by BJP’s Kapil Mishra.

Regarding much of the violence that occurred, it is important to note the role of social media in the growing polarity in the region. While social media platforms have played a role in documenting anti-Muslim violence, specifically [videos](#) of brutal violence and harassment going viral, questions have also arisen as to the role of social media in amplifying hate. For Facebook, India remains the country’s largest market but the platform is [marred](#) with hate speech, misinformation, and celebrations of violence. According to leaked internal documents this year, “Facebook did not have enough resources in India and was unable to grapple with the problems it had introduced there, including anti-Muslim posts.” Further, reports [showed](#) that “bots and fake accounts tied to the country’s ruling party and opposition figures were wreaking havoc on national elections.” While Facebook in India is aware that its platform has been used to [spread](#) conspiracy theories, including claims of “love jihad,” internal documents [revealed](#) that the social media giant has done little to act on it, and that “political sensitivities” are part of the reason that the company has chosen not to ban Hindu nationalist groups who are close to India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

In all of the major anti-Muslim episodes in the country this year, BJP politicians either were present or supported the individuals leading the campaigns. In India, it is the authorities themselves who remain the biggest proponents of Islamophobia as there’s a national campaign to subjugate, criminalize, and even eliminate the country’s Muslims.

The tense and hostile situation in the country has begged the question: [where is India headed?](#)

Over a billion people live in India, a state where in the past ethnic and religious differences have been exploited and resulted in deadly consequences. In the last few years, it seems the situation is reaching boiling point with numerous episodes of violence and discriminatory measures aimed at marginalizing the country's Muslims and other [minority](#) populations. PM Modi's government has instrumentalized and weaponized differences, specifically [religious differences](#), to gain support and in effect has emboldened and amplified a significant portion of society, leading Debasish Roy Chowdhury to draw [similarities](#) between 2021 India and 1930s Germany.

Perhaps nothing better captures the danger of a potential [anti-Muslim genocide brewing](#) in India than a video from a three day event held in mid-December and attended by influential religious leaders, right-wing Hindu activists, and even [members](#) of the BJP. The viral footage showed hundreds of attendees raising Nazi-style salutes and [vowing](#): "We all pledge, that until our last breath, we will make India a Hindu nation. We will fight and die and, if required, kill."

2021 Islamophobia in review: China

In 2021, the world heard more personal testimonies from Uyghurs who had survived China's network of [concentration camps](#) as a growing international movement called on countries to boycott the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. This year also involved Chinese authorities restructuring their targeting of Uyghurs, moving many prisoners to forced labor camps and institutionalizing discriminatory practices, such as [removing](#) domes from mosques, aimed at erasing Uyghur culture and identity. Growing calls from activists and rights organizations for action from the international community also contributed to an unofficial tribunal held in the UK, which found that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is committing genocide, a conclusion made by a number of countries this year including the [Canadian parliament](#), [MPs in the UK](#), [Dutch parliament](#), and the [Lithuanian parliament](#).

China's campaign targeting Uyghurs goes back decades and must be understood in the [settler-colonial context](#) of the region. However, following 9/11 and the introduction of the war on terror discourse, Chinese authorities [adopted this rhetoric](#) framing Uyghur Muslims as a security threat to the state and began slowly criminalizing various aspect of Uyghur culture and identity, all under the banner of [tackling](#) the "three evil forces" of separatism, extremism, and terrorism. The establishment of concentration camps, dubbed "re-education" centers by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), in 2017 and the projected growth of these fortresses of torture and psychological manipulation is just one aspect of China's wider campaign in the occupied Uyghur homeland (which Chinese authorities refer to as Xinjiang).

In 2021, the world heard more harrowing stories from survivors of China's [crackdown](#) in the region: a project involving [torture](#), rape, detention, indoctrination, and psychological abuse. In January, Gulbahar Haitiwaji wrote in detail her [experience](#) in China's police state as she returned to Xinjiang in late 2016 to sign some documents, only to be arrested and locked up for two years, where she was "systematically dehumanized, humiliated and brainwashed." Authorities [told](#) Haitiwaji she would be going to "school," a code word for the camps, which the government had built to "correct" Uighurs. Her recollection of her time in the camps echoed the personal testimonies of other survivors, as she recounted the psychological brainwashing and physical torture, with the ultimate aim being to "to deny who we were. To spit on our own traditions, our beliefs. To criticize our language. To insult our own people." Further a *BBC* piece [interviewed](#) a number of survivors who either experienced or witnessed "mass rape, sexual abuse and torture" in the camps.

Along with [harrowing testimonies](#), researchers and journalists in 2021 continued to [unlock](#) the [secrets](#) of Xinjiang's [prison state](#) that's been equipped with the latest in [surveillance](#) technology. A New Yorker [piece](#) from this year noted that Chinese authorities had claimed prisoners had "graduated" from the "re-education centers," but rather than being released many were either sentenced to long prison terms or sent to forced labor camps. Amnesty International [delved](#) into Beijing's practice of separating Uyghur children from their parents, a policy that would certainly result in the government's [aim](#) to "break their [Uyghur] lineage, break their roots, break their connections, and break their origins." The human rights organization estimated that thousands of

[Uyghur families](#) have been separated for years due to the government's actions in Xinjiang.

This year also brought attention to the gendered aspect and [coercive fertility](#) practices of the CCP's campaign targeting Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims, particularly how the government [rebranded](#) its forced sterilization policy as a feminist measure aimed at saving Uyghur women from [being](#) "baby-making machines." This argument came after [reports](#) showed that birthrates in the Uyghur homeland [have](#) "dropped dramatically in recent years – something that many international observers believe is down to [forced sterilizations](#)." A May 2021 [report](#) from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) found that "birth-rate across the region fell by nearly half (48.74 percent)" between 2017-2019, with the largest declines in "counties where Uyghurs and other indigenous communities are concentrated."

In addition to suppressing birthrates, the government has continued to imprison intellectuals and cultural and religious leaders of the community, often seen as lifelines to preserving the culture and heritage of particular groups. Two groups, Justice for All and the Uyghur Human Rights Project, released a [report](#) on how the government is cutting off "transmission of religious knowledge across Uyghur generations," as the authorities have "imprisoned or detained at least 630 Imams." A second [report](#) in December from UHRP found that "at least 312 intellectual and cultural elites were currently being held in some form of detention in the region," including scholars, professors, poets, musicians, doctors and writers. CCP policies in the region are not just aimed at the living as reporting from *Sky News* revealed that authorities have systematically [paved](#) over Uyghur graveyards, religious buildings, and shrines. The erasure of culture by bulldozing religious sites also brought attention to plans [announced](#) by Hilton Hotel, which would see a Hilton hotel built upon the former site of Duling Mosque in Hotan that was demolished by the government.

2021 also produced documentation illustrating the role of President Xi Jinping in the ongoing atrocities in Xinjiang. Secret [documents](#) with some marked "top secret" were leaked around November and included a number of speeches by Jinping that [covered](#) "security, population control and the need to punish the Uyghur population." In another leak, the ASPI was able to [uncover](#) "The Architecture of Repression," after receiving thousands of confidential documentation detailing how the "vast system of coercive state control works." This system [includes](#) human surveillance in the form of "neighborhood committees" and police, who monitor the community, sending "micro clues ... when someone does something irregular".

The documentation involving speeches by Jinping were leaked to the Uyghur Tribunal, a people's tribunal held in the UK composed of lawyers and rights experts to [investigate](#) whether China's persecution of Uyghurs amounts to genocide. The Tribunal, which [had](#) "no state backing and any judgement would not be binding on any government," heard witness testimony detailing mass torture, abuse, and rape. In December, the Tribunal [issued](#) its findings, stating that China is carrying out a [genocide](#) targeting Uyghur Muslims and crimes include "torture and the systematic suppression of births." Additionally, Human Rights Watch also [published](#) a report this year finding that China is committing "crimes against humanity" in its treatment of Uyghurs.

In response to the growing body of evidence illustrating the repression in the region, human rights activists and Uyghurs in the diaspora made numerous calls on the international community

to take action, one being to boycott the Beijing Winter Olympics in 2022. They weren't alone as politicians including UK [members of Parliament](#) and US [members of Congress](#) supported this action against the CCP. Shortly before the end of the year, President Biden [announced](#) a diplomatic [boycott](#) of the games in Beijing with Canada, the UK, and Australia [following](#) suit and joining the boycott as well. Additionally this year, the [US](#), the [Canadian parliament](#), [UK MPs](#), [Netherlands](#), and [Lithuania](#) declared that China is committing genocide. Lastly, President Biden ended the year by [signing](#) the Uyghur Forced Labor Act into law, which aims to ensure that goods made with forced labor in Xinjiang do not enter the United States market.

While there seems to be a growing movement calling attention to China's repression of Uyghur Muslims, the CCP is continuing its campaign, including by expanding it to target other areas where Muslims live in the country, such as by [removing](#) the "Arab-style" entrance hall of Xining's famous Dongguan Mosque, one of the largest in China. Further, the CCP spent the year responding to the growing international fervor by denying the repression and instead producing [propaganda](#) in an attempt to control the narrative on Xinjiang. Additionally, a *Foreign Policy piece* found that militarization in the region is being "scaled down" but it's being replaced with more insidious forms of control such as internal surveillance and greater propaganda.

Islamophobia in China has resulted in what rights groups and a number of governments around the globe have called a genocide targeting Uyghur and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang. China's arguments to justify this [repression](#) have all relied on anti-Muslim tropes, claiming that Uyghurs are a "threat" to the state and must be reformed to be good Chinese citizens. This "reform" has [involved](#) concentration camps, torture, surveillance, separation of families, forced sterilization, and so much more. While many powerful voices have stepped up to call out the repression, tangible [efforts](#) remain to be seen as China continues its [mission](#) to "destroy an entire people."

2021 Islamophobia in review: Canada

In July of 2021, Mustafa Farooq of the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) made a chilling [observation](#): “The reality is that Canada has suffered more mass killings motivated by Islamophobia in the last five years than any other country in the G7. This cannot be allowed to continue.” Farooq’s comments came a little over a month after a deadly targeted hit-and-run in London, Ontario that killed four members of a Canadian Muslim family, with the sole survivor being a 9-year-old boy. The incident sent shockwaves across the country, and Canadian Muslims called on the government to take [greater action](#) against rising anti-Muslim hatred in the country beginning with tackling bigoted rhetoric and support for discriminatory policies amongst those in power. The mass murder in London was just one of dozens of [attacks](#) that occurred throughout 2021 targeting Muslims, with visibly Muslim women [bearing the brunt](#) of the attacks, and their places of worship. In addition to these violent episodes, there was renewed conversation about institutional Islamophobia in the country as Quebec’s Bill 21 and the role of politicians in amplifying anti-Muslim rhetoric made headlines again.

The year began with uneasiness and fear as a spate of attacks targeted Muslim women living in Edmonton, Alberta. In the month before the new year, there are three reported hate-motivated incidents in the span of eight days in the city. In a virtual [news conference](#) in January 2021, the family member of two Black Muslim women who were targeted stated the two individuals were “violated [and] dehumanized,” and the attack had “shattered the illusion of our safety.” During the incident, a man [yelled](#) racial obscenities at the mother and daughter, pushed both women to the ground, ripped off the mother’s hijab, and yelled “go back to your country.” Nearly a year later in December 2021, Richard Bradley Stevens, the perpetrator of the crime, [remained](#) at large as authorities revealed he missed his court appearance.

A [string](#) of [attacks](#) high-profile day time [attacks continued](#) in the [city](#) in 2021 as Black Muslim women wearing the hijab faced threats, harassment, and physical assault, [leading](#) many Muslim women fearing for their public safety, with one individual [stating](#), “I’ve always been hyper-vigilant in public spaces because of my identity. But hearing about these attacks has made me more anxious and aware of my surroundings.” Community members also noted that while the media is finally paying attention to these assaults, targeted attacks against Muslim women are a common occurrence, [noting](#) that “Most of my visibly Muslim friends and family members have a story of some kind of Islamophobia. The general public hears about this through the media, while our reality is that these are our sisters and our mothers.” In addition to these assaults on Muslim women, individuals also targeted residences and [religious spaces](#), as graffiti [saying](#) “Kill all Muslims” was scrawled in the elevator of an apartment building, and a [swastika](#) was painted on a mosque.

In June 2021, [Nathaniel Veltman mowed down](#) a Canadian Muslim family out on an evening walk, killing four members of the Afzaal family and seriously injuring 9-year-old Fayez, who is now an orphan. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau [called](#) the incident a “terrorist attack” as Canadian Muslims were left shocked and scared with painful memories resurfacing from 2017’s deadly

Quebec mosque massacre, and many left [feeling](#) “it could have been any one of us.”

As the country reeled from the horrifying episode and the local community received an outpouring of support and solidarity, Canadian Muslims, rights activists, and journalists called attention to the growing anti-Muslim hostility in the country, which many argued was being supported by those in power. In response to the horrific crime, politicians across party lines issued their condolences, but many rights activists [noted](#) that a number of these individuals had opposed a 2017 motion ([M-103](#)) to condemn Islamophobia. Avnish Nanda, a public law litigator [stated](#), “There has been no reckoning, no apology, no real critical engagement with how these MPs fed into the Islamophobic narratives over the past few years due to their stance on M-103.” In one piece, *Al Jazeera* columnist Andrew Mitrovica [argued](#) the former Prime Minister Stephen Harper had played “accelerant-in-chief of fomenting suspicion and animus towards Muslims he was duty-bound to have, instead, welcomed and celebrated as loyal, devoted Canadians.” Bridge researcher Mobashra Tazamal [summarized](#) the decades of discriminatory rhetoric and policies supported by politicians, holding that perpetrators of deadly anti-Muslim attacks “feel supported and validated by those in power who promote anti-Muslim tropes and institute policies that subject Muslims to collective punishment.” In the wake of the grief that gripped the community, Canadian Muslims [declared](#) that words were not enough and the government needed to take action against rising Islamophobia.

The government’s response involved holding a [national summit on Islamophobia](#), which human rights advocate Amira Elghawaby [noted](#) “spurred dialogue...and consultations on a scale not previously seen,” as “hundreds of submissions from a [long list of civil liberties organizations, mosque and community associations and groups](#),” were made. However, Elghawaby was [careful](#) to add that “One day was never going to be enough to unpack it all, flesh out all the ways for governments to make amends, and hold them to it.” Further, advocacy and rights organization’s [emphasized](#) how it was no longer enough for politicians to simply rehash “messages of hope and sorrow the Muslim community has heard before,” and they expected concrete measures as to how the those in power would tackle anti-Muslim racism in society. In the least up to the summit, the National Council of Canadian Muslims [released 61 recommendations](#) to “the federal, provincial, and municipal governments calling for specific commitments to combat Islamophobia.” Following the summit, the NCCM [revealed](#) that while a “number of important commitments were made by the federal government, there was much that was not done,” specifically [noting](#) the federal government’s refusal to being involved in the legal challenge to [Bill 21](#) in Quebec- a piece of legislation that NCCM identified as creating “state-sanctioned second-class citizenship.”

In June 2019, Quebec passed [Bill 21](#), which “[prohibits](#) those who wear a ‘religious symbol’ from occupying a ‘position of authority’ in any public service job.” Since its passage, [commentators](#) and human rights [activists](#) have noted how the law [has](#) “institutionalized discrimination in employment for Muslim women in certain occupations in the public sector.” In December 2021, [the](#) “removal of Fatemeh Anvari put a face and a name” to Bill 21 after the elementary school teacher was removed from her post and [reassigned](#) to another position after she refused to remove her hijab. The case reignited the debate over the bill as parents and children [protested](#) against the teacher’s removal. Politicians also [commented](#) on the incident, with one Minister [calling](#) it a “cowardly” move, and a Conservative MP [saying](#) it’s an “absolute disgrace.”

However, the Quebec government itself [defended](#) the teacher's removal and reassignment, serving as yet another example of the number of ways government leaders have [supported and promoted](#) legislation and policies that severely restrict the rights of Canadian Muslims. Bill 21 will most likely be in the headlines again next year as a number of cities across the country have [joined together](#) to contribute funds for a legal fight against the law.

In 2021, Canadian Muslims experienced a wave of hate crimes and the mass murder of a Muslim family left the country in shock and the community in great fear. As the community called on politicians to take concrete steps to enact real change, rights activists also noted how those in power were also [responsible](#) for growing anti-Muslim discrimination. As Bridge researcher Mobashra Tazamal [summarized](#), "anti-Muslim racism is accepted and even applauded among mainstream media and [elected officials](#). This environment otherizes Muslims, creates public support for programs and policies that single out the community, and makes Muslims targets for attacks." Rights activists and community organizations have repeatedly [noted](#) that true efforts to tackle Islamophobia must start at the top.

2021 Islamophobia in Review: Europe

In 2021, Islamophobia in Europe was further institutionalized within policies and programs that effectively criminalized Muslim civil society on the continent. In France, President Emmanuel Macron introduced the anti-Separatism law restricting the rights of French Muslim citizens and essentially forcing Muslims religious leader to take an oath of loyalty. Meanwhile in Switzerland, the government approved a ban on the burqa, adding to the growing number of countries that have restricted Muslim women's right to religious freedom. Further, in the United Kingdom, the leading party again failed to take any meaningful action to root out Islamophobia amongst its ranks and in society, providing greater evidence that anti-Muslim racism is acceptable and approved by leading institutions in the country. The trend on the continent has been to construct Europe's Muslims as both a security and cultural threat, using arguments framed under counterterrorism and secularism to justify discriminatory and harmful rhetoric and practices that have severely curtailed the basic rights of Muslims.

In a review of 2021, Austrian academic and Bridge Senior Researcher Farid Hafez [described](#) the Europe's right-ward shift as the continent entering an age of "McCarthyism against Islam," with government policies framing Muslim citizenry as potential threats, suspicious, and ultimately untrustworthy. With the current status quo, it appears that "guilty until proven innocent increasingly becomes authorities' approach to Muslims," and Hafez [demonstrated](#) this by highlighting France, Austria, and Denmark's collective approach to fighting "political Islam." Arguments utilizing the vague and undefined concept of "political Islam" have been employed heavily in recent years by leading European politicians and academics, and used to defend counterterrorism programs and measures that infringe on basic human rights but are deemed necessary to fight this ominous threat. However, it's rarely been used to fight a militant or violent threat, rather the actions taken by the authorities has been to target Muslim civil society and rights organizations who call attention to the unjust actions of the government. The government-led campaign against "political Islam" has been wielded by those in power to silence its critics and is a clear example of the continent's right-ward shift.

In 2020, Hafez found [himself](#) on the [receiving end](#) of the government's intimidation campaign with more [information](#) coming out about this in 2021. In November 2020, the Austrian police carried out [Operation Luxor](#), which involved 930 people including police officers carrying out raids targeting 70 homes of key activists and academics from the Austrian Muslim community. In 2021, it was revealed that no one who was targeted by the operation, [described](#) as the largest police operation in Austria since the Second World War, had been charged with any crime with the Higher Court of Graz [ruling](#) that the raids were unlawful.

In addition to greater information about Operation Luxor, 2021 witnessed even more alarming [measures](#) by the Austrian government including calls for a [registry of Muslim imams](#) and the creation of an "Islam map." All of these actions were introduced under the guise of anti-terrorism, but in [actuality](#) "severely curtailed civil liberties, putting at risk the freedoms of religion, expression and association. The goal, first and foremost, is apparently to target Muslim civil society." The introduction of the "National Map of Islam" by the [government established Documentation Center Political Islam spread great fear](#) amongst the community given the rising hate crimes and violence targeting Muslims in Europe. The public interactive digital map

[contained](#) the names and locations of more than 600 mosques, associations and officials in Austria. The map was introduced by Susanne Raab, Austria's integration minister, in May 2021 with her insisting the measure was intended "to fight political ideologies, not religion." Following the publication of the map, there was a [documented increase](#) in anti-Muslim attacks, with "incendiary anti-Muslim signs" hung outside mosques in various cities. The signs depicted an "angry Muslim" and warned of the dangers of political Islam underneath, with the writing "Beware! Political Islam nearby." On the last day of May 2021, the Council of Europe issued a [statement](#) in response to the "Islam Map," noting that "Muslims perceive the form and timing of the publication as extremely discriminatory. They feel stigmatized and threatened in their security by the publication of addresses and other details" and concluding that map should be "withdrawn in its current form." While it was reported that the government had taken down the map in June, it was again made [public](#) just two weeks later.

In neighboring France, President [Emmanuel Macron](#) solidified his presidency as one marked by state-led Islamophobia, where under his leadership the government instituted measures that stigmatized and collectively [punished](#) France's nearly 6 million Muslims. Much like Austria, Macron's government hinged on the "political Islam" boogeyman to justify measures that not only severely curtailed the rights of Muslims but many argued also was an attack on [French secularism](#). In late 2020, under the [guise](#) of fighting "political Islam," Macron gave Muslim religious leaders an ultimatum, essentially forcing Imams to [sign a charter](#) or otherwise be considered a threat and enemy to the state. In March 2021, a coalition of civil society organizations [urged](#) the European Commission to investigate France at the European Court of Justice over the charter, saying that it "violates Muslims' right to free speech and religious freedoms."

In 2020, Macron also introduced the [anti-separatism bill](#), which was [approved](#) by Members of Parliament in February 2021 and [adopted](#) by the National Assembly on July 23, 2021. French legal scholar Rim-Sarah Alouane [described](#) the bill as an "attack" on civil liberties, stating, "I see a blatant attack on freedom of association. This bill has no safeguards of potential abuse from public authorities," and further [noted](#) that "French Muslims are paying the price of the failure of the state to prevent terrorist attacks from happening." Further the bill also included measures aimed at increasing restrictions on Muslim women's ability to wear the hijab, with the argument of [religious neutrality](#) used to extend the hijab ban to private companies under contract with the state.

In January 2021, a coalition of thirty-six organizations from thirteen countries submitted a twenty-eight-page document to the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), [calling](#) on the international body to "open formal infringement procedures against France's government for entrenching Islamophobia and structural discrimination against Muslims." The organizations alleged that under Macron's governance, France's recent "actions and policies in relation to Muslim communities violated international and European laws."

In 2021, Macron's government continued in its smear campaign against Islam and Muslims, as his Minister of Higher Education and Research [declared](#) her intention to order the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) to mount an investigation into "["Islamogauchism"](#)" or "Islamogauchism" in the country's universities. Vidal had indicated in an interview with [CNews](#)

that “Islamism, the eternal bogeyman in French society.” Many critics noted that these actions were being taken by the government to play on the ongoing culture wars, and to silence any group or individual who called out the government's Islamophobia, by [linking anyone](#) on the left with “‘Islamism,’ the eternal bogeyman in French society.”

The measures aimed at dismantling French Muslim civil society remained in force as a French court [confirmed](#) the [dissolution](#) of the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF), a leading anti-discrimination group that tracked Islamophobia in the country. Adding to this, in 2021 the government [shut down](#) a Muslim publishing house. In October 2021, Interior Minister Gerard Darmanin [announced](#) the government would close 7 more mosques and associations in the country by the end of the year, and stated that since Macron had taken office, “some 13 associations have been closed along with 92 of the 2,500 mosques in the country.” Under the pretense of tackling “radicalization” and “political Islam,” the French government has taken measures to dismantle Muslim civil society and strike fear in the French Muslim community.

Experts, commentators, and writers all noted how the current political climate in France involved a [surge](#) in the far-right and an overall massive shift [right-ward](#) in the country. Given the upcoming 2022 presidential elections, it appears that candidates in the running to lead the country are [attempting](#) to [outdo each other](#) when it comes to [blatant](#) anti-Muslim bigotry. Amongst the candidates, which include President Macron and [Marine Le Pen](#), is a newcomer who has truly shaken up the political landscape. In 2021 [Eric Zemmour](#), a far-right French writer and political pundit who supports the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory, peddles historical revisionism, and has a history of making racist and anti-Muslim comments, [announced](#) his campaign for presidency. While many sought to exceptionalize Zemmour for his racist and anti-Muslim views, others argued that his rhetoric is very much [in line with](#) what the French establishment has been supporting throughout the years.

In the United Kingdom, the Conservative party dragged its feet once again when it came to tackling the well-documented prevalence of Islamophobia amongst its ranks. Nearly two years after PM Boris Johnson committed himself to an investigation into Islamophobia, which was later [broadened](#) to include “other forms of prejudice,” the party finally released a report on the investigation. Professor Swaran Singh analyzed 1,418 complaints relating to 727 separate incidents as recorded in the Tories' complaints database between 2015 and 2020. He [noted](#) that, “judging by the extent of complaints and findings of misconduct by the party itself that relate to anti-Muslim words and conduct, anti-Muslim sentiment remains a problem within the party.” The report stopped short of concluding there was “institutional racism” in the party, an allegation made by former Tory chair Baroness Warsi. In response, Lady Warsi disagreed with this conclusion, [noting](#) that there were issues “from the top ... to the bottom” of the party. Additionally, it was [reported](#) that critics believed the report was “doomed to failure because of a deep mistrust in the process that was seen by many senior Muslim Tories as flawed from the start,” with one Tory source [reporting](#) that “not a single Conservative Muslim MP has been quoted in the report.”

While it finally produced the report, the party has still yet to define Islamophobia. In 2019, then-Communities Secretary stated the party government would [come up with](#) its own “working definition of Islamophobia,” [after](#) “claiming that the definition proposed by the All-Party

Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims was not in line with the Equality Act 2010 and could ‘undermine free speech.’” More than two years later, the Conservatives remain reluctant to deal with the issue, leading journalist Basit Mahmood to [conclude](#) that “by failing to come up with its own definition of Islamophobia, and by refusing to let its victims define their own suffering, it [the Conservative party] can continue to portray hatred and racism against Muslims as a matter of debate.” In 2021 it was also [revealed](#) that PM Johnson had failed to respond for an entire year to MP Afzal Khan’s call for action on Islamophobia. Further in November 2021, during a debate on Islamophobia Awareness Month, Conservative MPs were [accused](#) of “eye-rolling at a debate on Islamophobia as MPs shared their experiences of anti-Muslim bigotry.” The ongoing failure of the Tories to acknowledge and tackle Islamophobia has sent a signal to wider society that anti-Muslim racism is tolerated by those in power.

In British society, hostility against Muslims remained present in various sectors, with numerous incidents in the sports and media industry. In November 2021, the home office released statistics [finding](#) that “Muslims have been the target of almost half of recorded religious hate crimes.” In an October 2021 *Guardian* piece, Nick Cohen [remarked](#) on London Mayor’s Sadiq Khan’s 24/7 security given the level of threat he faces in and how this reality “challenges the self-congratulatory claim that ‘[Britain is the least racist country in the world.](#)’” Cohen further elaborated noting the rightward shift in the political and media landscape had created an environment in which anti-Muslim hate had become the norm. Further, he touched on the role of the media in shaping the current situation, [stating](#) that “Conservative newspapers know their readership and understand that putting Khan’s name in a headline guarantees angry clicks. No attack on Khan is too trivial to dismiss.” When it comes to the [media](#) in the UK, a 2021 [report](#) from the Centre for Media Monitoring [found](#) that there was widespread anti-Muslim bias in press coverage. In an analysis of coverage between 2018 and 2020, the CfMM [found](#) that “almost 60 percent of the articles and 47 percent of the television clips associated Muslims and/or Islam with negative aspects of behavior.”

Lastly, 2021 experienced a renewed conversation about the prevalence of racism and Islamophobia in [sport](#). Early on in the year, a study was [conducted](#) in which “more than 40 men and women from Muslim backgrounds shared their experiences of facing anti-Muslim hatred in Sunday league football from fans, teammates and opponents.” Then in November, former Yorkshire [Azeem Rafiq delivered](#) a heartbreaking and damning testimony as he gave evidence to the parliamentary inquiry into racism in cricket. While many in British society expressed shock at Rafiq’s experiences, British Muslims remarked how they too had endured similar instances of racism and Islamophobia growing up, with Shaista Aziz [noting](#) that “institutional racism isn’t exceptional. What marks him [Rafiq] out is the fact he is *finally* being listened to and believed: by MPs, the cricketing authorities and the media. When I was growing up, the P-word was used frequently against me, my family members and my friends; it was often followed up by violence.”

This year also witnessed more policies in Europe limiting the rights of Muslim women, with voters in Switzerland [approving](#) a referendum banning Muslims from wearing a face veil in public. This occurred in an environment in which covid face masks, which ostensibly do the same thing in regards to covering, are mandatory and where [only](#) around 30 women are believed to wear a face veil. The campaign supporting this measure utilized anti-Muslim tropes, [tying](#) the

veil to extremism and violence. Switzerland isn't unique in its measures restricting Muslim women's dress; France, Denmark, Austria, the Netherlands, and Bulgaria all have similar restrictions in place. Arguments in support of these restrictions have either framed the veil and hijab as a [security or cultural threat](#), or justified these measures under the [guise of feminism](#), [claiming](#) they're needed to "free Muslim women." French legal scholar Rim-Sarah Alouane [warned](#) that "Switzerland's crackdown on Islamic symbols is normalizing anti-Muslim bigotry across the political spectrum."

In 2021, Europe continued on a right-ward path as anti-Muslim racism became the norm in media, politics, and society. While some political leaders dragged their feet in addressing the issue of Islamophobia, many others openly incorporated dangerous and discriminatory anti-Muslim rhetoric into their agenda. Government policies aimed at [dismantling](#) Muslim civil society, are also in effect leading to the decay of European democracy as such measures severely curtail free speech and free expression. In some countries, leaders have also targeted non-Muslim organizations and individuals, who are calling attention to the government's discriminatory campaigns, and are smearing them as "Islamists" to silence critics. In 2021, Europe's Muslims experienced greater marginalization, especially [Muslim women](#) who have been on the receiving end of countless bills and laws aimed at restricting their right to dress, and in effect excluded them from mainstream society. The continent's leap right-ward, the encroaching reach of the state, and the blatant widespread anti-Muslim racist rhetoric are far more than alarming: they are at fever-pitch levels.